

Lake Washington Ship Canal

When the first settlers arrived in 1851, saltwater bays, freshwater lakes, and heavily timbered forests surrounded Seattle. Forests stretched for miles on the east side of Lake Washington, an area also rich with numerous coal deposits. With these economic and natural resources east of Lake Washington, and most people two lakes to the west in Seattle, transportation was important. Coal was transported north around the lake via train, requiring 11 transfers along its journey to Seattle. Logs were moved via land, but rainy weather kept dirt roads muddy, making this an extremely difficult task. It was clear a water transportation route was needed.

On July 4, 1854, pioneer Thomas Mercer gave Lake Union its name and suggested that one day, lakes Washington and Union be united in a single body of water, connecting them with Puget Sound. For the next 63 years, Seattle struggled to make the canal a reality. After studying many different canal routes and types of construction, work began in 1911. Two major sections of excavation were the Fremont and Montlake cuts. On July 4, 1917, the Lake Washington Ship Canal and Hiram M. Chittenden Locks Project was dedicated.

Today, the locks and ship canal provide a transportation route for thousands of vessels annually. Vessels such as sand and gravel barges, fuel barges,

log tows, fishing vessels, and numerous types of pleasure craft benefit from this project.

Fremont Cut

The north side of the cut is bordered by the city's Burke-Gilman hike and bike trail. Rock benches and an overlook provide places to rest and observe boat traffic in the canal. Popular activities include sightseeing of boats and waterfowl, picnicking, jogging, walking, and bicycling. The south side of the canal also has park benches and a developed biking and pedestrian trail.

Montlake Cut

Originally only a 6-foot-wide log flume, the Montlake Cut is now a favorite getaway for many Seattle residents. Along the south side, visitors enjoy the 1,200-foot-long Montlake Cut National Scenic Waterside Trail. This scenic promenade connects the University of Washington's Arboretum Trail with the city's West Montlake Park on Portage Bay.

Along the footpath border are a variety of plants and three observation decks. Designed by the Corps' landscape architects and engineers and the Seattle Garden Club, this trail was constructed in 1970 and was designated as a National Recreation Trail a year later.

Located at the east end of the trail is a 40-foot-high totem pole. Carved by the famous Haida Chief, John Wallace, this totem pole was donated to the city of Seattle and dedicated at Montlake Cut in May 1983.

Popular activities include sightseeing, picnicking, fishing, and jogging. Annually in May, thousands of Seattleites line the shores of the cut to watch the parade of boats that marks the opening day of boating season.

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